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UNITY OF THE HUMAN RACE

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NEVER has there been an obstacle to human progress so great as the idea of the inequality of mankind—an idea glaringly opposed to all the best tendencies of general civilization and culture. It was man for whom God created His numerous blessings. To all men, again, He gave the same capacities wherewith to utilize His gifts. But a large section of the human race is still deprived of those blessings on account of this very same inequality. If religion came from God, its first duty should have been to remove this inequality and establish a feeling of perfect unity among men. But the fact remains that it was the religions themselves—all those religions that came before Islam—that helped to create this trouble of inequality and disunion. The ancient religion of Persia—that is to say, the cult of the Parsis—was responsible for the caste system that obtains in India. It was after them (the Parsis) that the people of India were divided into four sections. It is religion that has deprived millions of human beings

of their ordinary rights as men. To-day there are more than 60,000,000 "untouchables" in India. The higher classes hate the very shadow of these despised beings, on purely religious grounds. Further than this, these unfortunate people have not the right to enter any house of God, nor are they allowed to hear His Words (*i.e.* the Vedas). For thousands of years they have been rotting in the same miserable avocations of life which they happened to enter upon at one time,—when forced thereto by the sheer necessity of earning a livelihood. We have seen in the West sons of cobblers rising to the Premiership, but the *chamar* (cobbler) in India is a *chamar*, through tens of thousands of years right up to the present day. Of course, it is open to this *chamar* to embrace the faith of Islam, and thus become a dealer in hides in the second generation, and a general merchant in the third. In social status also, he may rise higher and higher until, in course of time, he becomes a member of the aristocracy. But these possibilities are closed against him so long as he sticks to his ancestral religion. Similarly, from the point of view

of Transmigration, persons who are in an abject condition in this life are in that condition on account of the vices and sins of their previous lives! It is no wonder, then, that the "untouchables" and such low-class people (as they are called) should be looked down upon with hatred by other Hindus. If these people were vicious and sinful in their previous lives (as is supposed), it is perhaps reasonable that we should keep aloof from them. Logically the conclusion is right. Thus this theory of Transmigration, which is one of the fundamental doctrines in Hinduism, has created a serious division in the human race; but the same crime has also been committed by Christianity, although in a different way. According to the Christian faith he alone who is baptized at the time of his birth is entitled to a life in Heaven; and all not so fortunate are doomed to a life in hell; so that even if a child born of Christian parents dies before it is baptized, it is not buried in consecrated ground; and in Russia, a few centuries back, such children were burnt instead of being buried at all. If, from the point of view of the Christians,

the whole of the non-Christian world are destined for hell from their very birth and are incapable of realizing the truth, it is no wonder that they should hate the thought of them. The conduct of the present-day Christians should not be adduced as belying this fact, seeing that this changed mentality is the result of modern culture and education and the broadness of mind resulting therefrom. What is essential in this connection is to get the right idea of the condition of the Christian mind some centuries back, and of the words that they utter even now in churches. If, again, we open the book of Common Prayer, the edition that was current before its present revised form (which is a thing of three or four years' growth and never likely to be generally accepted), it will be clearly seen, in what is known as the Athanasian Creed, that any man who fails to have faith in Jesus is doomed to everlasting hell-fire. Moreover, the curses that come from the lips of the worshippers in the churches are in part understood to be meant for the Turks, who, some two generations back, were regarded as synonymous with Muslims. Now, what

should be the attitude of a good Christian when he comes out of church after joining in these prayers and curses ? What a blessing, then, has Islam proved to the human race in this respect ! The Prophet of Islam made it quite clear that every human being is born free from any taint of sin, and accordingly a heavenly thing so far as his birth is concerned. The teachings of all other religions have the same trend as that which we find in Hinduism and Christianity. With each of these religions the rest of mankind counts for nothing, seeing that, according to them, no other creed is fit for receiving the Divine dispensation.

Political laws come next to religion in creating fundamental cultural inequalities in the human race. The Greeks and the Romans (in a lesser degree) were not concerned with any revealed religion ; but they too treated their subject nations very badly. They kept these conquered people as bond-slaves and tortured them whenever they thought fit. Even a law-giver like Justinian divided the people of Rome into two sharply divided groups; one of which was in the position of master while the

other was worse than a slave. To which-ever nation we turn in the pre-Islamic days the same spectacle meets our eyes. Every-where we find a large section of humanity deprived of any and every chance of progress and happiness. But this is ancient history. Even to-day, the nations of the West are, more or less, perpetrating the same wrongs. The original inhabitants of Africa are treated as slaves, and the conquered people are deprived of the rights that are the privilege of the ruling class. Before the Great War there were separate penal laws in Dar-es-Salaam (Africa), one for the rulers and another for the subjects. Even to-day, people only partially realize the essence of religion. As a matter of fact, the principal work of a religion should be to provide for the comforts of humanity, and to free it from the shackles forged by tradition and custom. What greater cala-mity can befall the human race than those which have been discussed above? Ex-amine the civilization and religion of any nation before the advent of Islam, and you will find that not one was able to free mankind from these types of bondage,

whereas if there was any special work for religion or revelation, it was only this—the work for freedom. As I have already remarked, the Holy Prophet Muhammad is surely entitled to be called the Greatest of the Prophets, if once we take into consideration the rules that the Qur-án has framed to ensure the freedom of man proceeding out of religious faith. I cannot emphasize this fact too strongly. If Moses, Jesus, Krishna, and Ramchandra (all being prophets) failed to deliver mankind from the distress that was caused by the absence of unity and equality in the race itself, then, from this point of view, the Prophet Muhammad has a far higher right to this prophetical post than any of his predecessors.

First of all, the Qur-án in its very opening describes God as Rabb-ul-'Alamín—meaning that He has created and nurtured every member of the human race in the same way. Next, as if to remove the curse of distinction that has cropped up in the West, it speaks of God as the "Lord of the East as well as the West," which means that the people of the East and the West have equally come under His care

of "Rabúbiyyat." Again, the Qur-án gives the name of "Rahmàn" to God, which is the same as saying that in the distribution of His blessings He makes no distinction of nation, religion, race, or family. The door of His mercy is equally open to all. From the social standpoint it is declared again that all men are members of one and the same family, and that they have always been given the same religion, but that people disagreed about it. Again, to establish a universal brotherhood, it taught that those who accept good principles and practise them are brothers to each other. It was the racial, national, and religious distinctions that created dissension among mankind. To remove these the Holy Qur-án made virtue the standard of honour, which is a thing attainable alike by black and white, by high and low. The Book says, for example, that Mughal, Sheikh or Pathan, Brahmin or Kshatriya, British or French are so called only to be identified, but these appellations have nothing to do with the worth and honour of a man. Mankind, as a whole, has been declared by God to be both honourable and

excellent.' But no one is entitled to this honour by virtue of birth or nationality ; rather has it to be acquired by piety ; and piety consists in good actions. To eradicate the distinctions of birth, the Book speaks of the Jews, saying that if they prided themselves on having descended from Abraham they should at the same time remember that even when the Lord Abraham had prayed to God that his descendants might be blessed, God replied by saying that no doubt his descendants would be blessed, but that the evil-doers from among them would not be benefited by that blessing.¹ Similar is the pronouncement upon the unwarrantable assertion of every religious community, not excepting some present-day Muslims, that as they belong to such-and-such a religion all others are useless ; and it is only they that have any right to spiritual life. On this point, by way of illustration, the Holy Qur-án takes the cases of the Jews and the

¹ "And surely, We have dignified the children of Adam" (Qur-án, xvii. 70).

² "He said: Surely I will make you a leader of men. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the unjust, said He" (Qur-án, ii. 124).

Christians' and declares that these absurd claims are mere verbiage. The reality of religion consists in a person resolving to bring all his faculties under the Will of God, and then acting upon this determination. Those who succeed in doing this are, in the words of the Holy Book, the only persons who come under the Rabúbiyyat of God—that is to say, who attain a perfect condition of life.

The true religion in man is actually a distinguishing feature; but unfortunately, nowadays, the mere association with any religion is considered respectable, and, what is worse, others are looked down upon on the basis of this sense of false distinction. To eradicate such a pernicious notion the Holy Book announces that he alone is successful in the eyes of God, who, besides believing in God and the Day of Judgment, does good deeds, no matter whatever religion he belongs to.¹ If we look into

¹ "And they say: None shall enter the garden (of Paradise) except he who is a Jew or a Christian. These are their vain desires" (Qur-an, ii. 111).

² "Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve" (Qur-an. ii. 62).

the matter a bit more closely we shall find that even the purpose of believing in God and the Day of Resurrection is to produce good actions, because these two beliefs are the sources from which good actions spring and the power that keeps a man from vice. In brief, if there is anything that can rightly form the basis of distinction it is good actions; so much so that on one occasion the Holy Book chastises the Jews and Christians by the remark that it is strange that they should look down upon others simply because they descended from Abraham and Jacob, whereas Abraham and Jacob were themselves not free from the responsibility of their actions, and had to account for what they had done. Yet again, to remove this hollow sense of distinction, it declares that God is the One God for all; all are, therefore, equal in His

The Holy Qur-án is thus the only Book in religious literature that has been able to deal an effective blow to all sorts of false distinctions and intolerances, and to give a charter of unity and liberty to all mankind. If, in the light of the verse just quoted, we make good actions the only criterion of honour and distinction, in a moment all those national, linguistic, colour, and territorial disturbances that have proved to be the veritable curses for humanity will disappear. So radical does this verse appear in its attitude that it has caused misgivings in some minds with regard to its real sense. These have gone so far as to hold that, according to it, even a belief in the prophethood does not seem indispensable.

eyes, the whole affair rests on good deeds ; why do people, then, quarrel among themselves ?

Thus to teach, on the one hand, that there is only One God for all and that His mercy and blessings as Rabb are equally meant for all, and to announce, on the other, that all men are members of the same family, that there are no such divisions in humanity as exist between the West and the East ; and further, to level all distinctions of nation, race, colour, and community by upholding rectitude of action as the only mark of real distinction ; and lastly, to class all virtuous men as brothers to one another—are the four glorious achievements of Islam, the parallels of which are nowhere to be seen in the history of mankind. To recount the benefits of these teachings is only arguing an admitted fact. It is Islam alone that, besides inculcating these teachings, has given them a practical shape. So, as I have said, it will be just and fair to call Muhammad a Prophet on the ground of these sublime teachings even without having regard to any other.

